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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of predictability, perceived similarity, trust and love on each other and involvement in romantic relationships by developing and testing (by path analysis) two models. One model incorporated involvement in romantic relationships as a dependent variable; the second model incorporated involvement as an independent variable. Survey results from 87 dating couples indicate that love and involvement in romantic relationships are products of complex interrelationships among factors which differ by sex. Men trust predictable women, love trustworthy women, and maintain relationships with women they love and can predict. Women trust men perceived to be similar, love men they trust and can predict, and primarily remain involved with men they can predict. This process is cyclical: involvement influences predictability and, for women, influences perceptions of similarity. Since similarity and predictability in turn influence involvement directly and indirectly, a recycling process results. These sex differences are best explained by the differential status of the sexes in contemoprary society. (Author)

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Love and Involvement in Romantic Relationships[1]

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"Why do some romantic relationships seem to work and endure while others flounder, fail or never get off the ground?" Many of us have asked ourselves this question for personal reasons. It is also an empirical question which I have been attempting to answer. The present research in part has been guided by what has seemed to me to be deficiencies in the literature available on romantic relationships, areas of research that have thus far been ignored but are clearly important for an understanding of involvement in romantic relationships. One deficiency is that there has been very little examination of actual relationships and the factors that facilitate couples remaining together. Of the factors that have been considered, two which intuitively appear to be important in maintaining cohesion and love in romantic relationships--understanding and trust--have been relatively ignored to date. A final deficiency is that the complexity of romantic relationships and the interrelationships among factors has not been adequately explored or emphasized. Researchers tend to look at individual factors in isolation without regard for the probable interdependence among factors.

The purpose of the present research, based on these considerations, was to look at several factors, including perceived similarity, trust and understanding, their influence on love and involvement in ongoing re-

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lationships, and their influence on each other. To this end two general models were proposed whose development was derived from an interest in the role of understanding in romantic relationships. The other variables under consideration were selected on the basis of their relationship to this role of understanding.

In the first model (Figure 1a) the interrelationships derived from the "starting point" of understanding were as follows: 1) understanding is likely to develop from perceived similarity because the sharing of the same viewpoint and interests provides more information about and insight into another person than a lack of sharing; 2) understanding enhances trust since knowing what to expect from another is a basis for trusting that other; 3) understanding is a basis for love since it enhances a sense of intimacy with another; and 4) understanding enhances involvement in a relationship since understanding is a rewarding experience. The remaining interconnections include the following: 1) perceived similarity is a basis for attraction and involvement; 2) trust is a basis for love and involvement; and 3) love is a basis for involvement. Thus, the first model incorporated involvement in a relationship as a dependent variable and looks at the impact of perceived similarity, understanding, trust and love on involvement in romantic relationships.

In the second model (Figure 1b) it was proposed that trust and understanding increase over time and interaction with one's partner, and that involvement and perceived similarity covary. It was further proposed that, as in the first model, similarity enhances understanding and understanding enhances trust. Thus the second model incorporated involvement as an independent variable and looks at the recycling effect, that is, the impact involvement has on the variables proposed to influence involvement in the first place.

Method

Subjects and Procedure. The subjects were 87 couples who had been dating steadily for at least one month. The sample was largely white, middle class, young adults. At least one partner was a student at the University of California, Davis. The average length of the relationships was 16 months. The subjects were solicited through advertisements in the student newspaper and elsewhere on campus and received no renumeration for participation except experimental credit for psychology courses upon request. The couples simply attended prearranged sessions together and independently completed the questionnaire described in the following section.

Materials. The questionnaire was specifically designed for this study and contained, among other items, demographic items, involvement measures (number of months dating), a love scale (Rubin, 1973), a trust scale (Dion & Dion, 1975), and measures of perceived similarity and understanding. Understanding was operationalized as predictive accuracy, or how well an individual knows or can guess the behavior and attitudes of his/her partner. Items for perceived similarity and predictive accuracy were derived from Taylor and Altman's (1966) disclosure items. Each subject responded twice to these items, once from his/her own perspective and once as he/she felt his/her partner partner would respond. Similarity scores were obtained by comparing a subject's own responses with how he/she felt his/her partner would respond, and predictive accuracy scores were obtained by comparing a subject's prediction of his/her partner to the actual responses of the partner. Thus, potential scores ranged from 9-81 for love, 4-36 for trust, and 0-69 for similarity and predictive accuracy, with larger scores indicating greater amounts of each of these variables. The obtained ranges, means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1 and indicate the similarity in scores for males and females.

Results

The proposed models were evaluated by path analysis, a procedure that evaluates causal schema and determines direct and indirect effects of independent variables on a dependent variable; only the direct effects will be considered in the following analysis. (For further explanation of path analysis see Tesser & Paulhus, 1976.)

The results indicate that the models are generally supported by the data, but differentially for males and females. For the first model for males (Figure 2a), five of the hypothesized relationships are supported by the data: involvement is influenced by similarity, predictive accuracy and love; love is influenced by trust; and trust is influenced by predictive accuracy. For the first model for females (Figure 2b), six of the hypothesized relationships are supported by the data: involvement is influenced by similarity, love and predictive accuracy; love is influenced by trust and predictive accuracy; and similarity and predictive accuracy covary. Also for females, unexpectedly, there is a marginally significant negative effect of trust on involvement, and trust is a product of similarity, not predictive accuracy.

For the second model for males (Figure 3a) two of the proposed relationships are supported by the data: involvement leads to predictive accuracy and predictive accuracy leads to trust. For the second model for females (Figure 3b), three of the proposed relationships are supported by the data: involvement and similarity covary; and predictive accuracy develops from involvement and similarity. Again, unexpectedly, similarity, not predictive accuracy, leads to trust.

All of these models are significant at the .01 level except for the model predicting trust for males, which is not significant.

Discussion

In summary, from consideration of both models, it appears that love and involvement in romantic relationships are products of complex interrelationships among factors, and these interrelationships differ by sex. For men, involvement in a relationship is based primarily on love and understanding, love develops from trust, and trust develops from understanding. The longer the two partners have been dating, the greater the understanding, which results in a recycling process. For women, and unlike men, involvement in a relationship is more a product of understanding than of love, and trust develops from perceived similarity rather than understanding. In general, women remain involved with a man they understand, love a man they understand and trust, and trust a man who is similar. Similarity and understanding are also related. As with men, the process is cyclical, with involvement over time facilitating the development of similarity and understanding.

One explanation that accounts for the results is the "principle of least interest" which is defined as "that person is able to dictate the conditions of association whose interest in the continuation of the affair is least (Waller & Hill, 1951, p. 191). In other words, the person who has the most to gain from the continuation of a relationship is the one who is likely to make the adjustments necessary to maintain it. In contemporary society, it is women in general who have more to gain by obtaining a desirable mate because of thir generally lower status and lesser power (Murstein, 1971; Rosenblatt, 1974). The present research indicates that women may indeed be making greater adjustments than their male counterparts. First, combining the two models for women, understanding increases with involvement in a relationship and is at the same time correlated with perceived similarity,

which also increases with involvement. This may mean that by learning about their partners over time, women can develop similarity to their partners. These similarities may then provide a basis for trust because the more common interests they share, the less likely a man is to lose interest, and also because a man may interpret this interest in his interests as caring and reciprocate the feeling.

Finally, love plays a less important role than predictive accuracy in the maintenance of a relationship for women, which is also in accord with the principle of least interest. The lesser importance of love in the model for women may mean that a woman remains somewhat emotionally detached because of her greater vulnerability, as a way of balancing some of the control in the relationship. Further, the lower status of a woman relative to her partner also promotes a pragmatic approach to courtship for women (Kephart, 1967). A woman's status is still predominantly determined by her mate's status, and she is better off if she maintains a rational approach to mate selection, at least to some degree. Love is nice but doesn't pay the rent.

The principle of least interest appears to be able to explain the data for males, also. The role of predictability is important, and may be that in prefering predictability or understanding a man is more likely to maintain the control of the relationship. However, it is also possible, being the one in control of the relationship through ascribed and achieved masculine status, the man need not actively control the situation. Accuracy of predictability may simply be a result of the partner's willingness to adjust. If the partner is willing to adjust the man may perceive this as an attempt to make the relationship work, may reciprocate the indicated emotional involvement, and even trust a partner who wants the relationship to work. Additionally, love is also an important reason a relationship is maintained for men. In a sense they can allow themselves the luxury of having a

relationship based on love; a good mate may be a valuable asset, but is not essential. Also, in the traditional relationship, a man may need the rewards of love in order to keep him paying the rent.

Another interpretation, from a disclosure approach, is also possible. Previous research has indicated that males are less inclined to disclose personal information to other males than females are to other females (e.g. Cosby, 1973). It is also possible than males are less likely than females to reveal information about themselves to their opposite sexed partners. If this difference in disclosure willingness is combined with the strong probability that much predictive accuracy is acquired through the disclosure process (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Levinger & Snoek, 1972) this may provide an alternative explanation for at least some of the present findings. Several possibilities include: 1) trust may develop from similarity for females rather than predictive accuracy due to the lesser willingness of a male to reveal personal information, whereas trust develops from predictive accuracy for males because women are more likely to disclose information about themselves; 2) the negative effect of trust on length for females may be due to their increased vulnerability over time as they increasingly reveal more personal information, which is not true for males as they are more reticent; 3) involvment over time has a great impact on predictive accuracy for males (path coefficient = .33) but a lesser impact for females (path coefficient = .19) suggesting that females are disclosing more over time than males are. This disclosure process explanation is currently being investigated by examining the specific information partners have about each other at various stages of a relationship.

In conclusion, the question raised at the beginning of this report has been partially answered. Love, trust and understanding are important in

relationship development and influence the continuance of relationships. But there are still many unanswered questions which only further research can help to solve.

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Figure 1a: Proposed Model Predicting Involvement

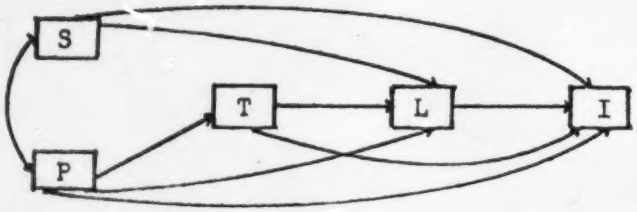

Figure 1b: Proposed Model Predicting Trust

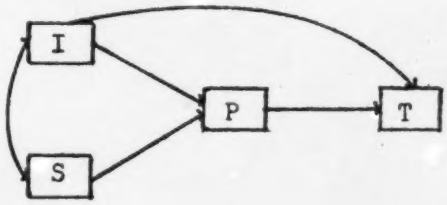

Figure 2: Path Analysis for Model Predicting Involvement

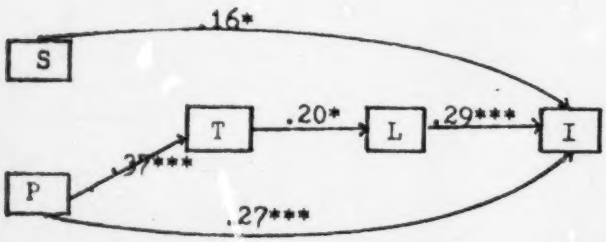

Figure 2a: Males

Figure 3: Path Analysis for Model Predicting Trust

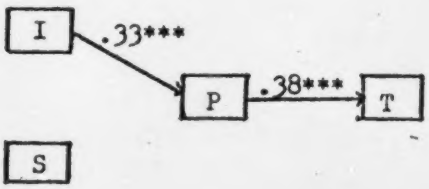

Figure 3a: Males

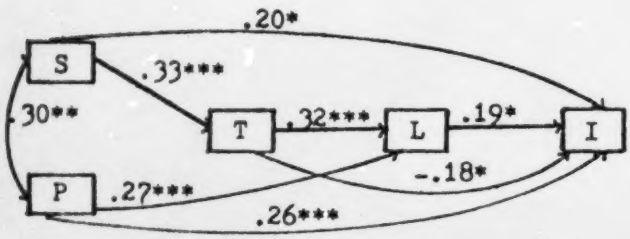

Figure 2b: Females

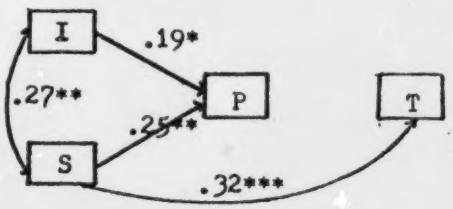

Figure 3b: Females

Note: S = Perceived Similarity; P = Predictability; T = Trust; L = Love; I = Involvement

* = $p<.05$; ** = $p<.01$; *** = $p<.001$

direction of arrows = direction of effect

Love and Involvement in Romantic Relationships

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TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics:

Perceived similarity, predictive accuracy, trust and love

	Males	Females
Perceived Similarity		
Obtained range	23-53	15-57
Mean	35.45	33.31
Standard deviation	7.33	7.34
Predictive Accuracy		
Obtained range	16-53	21-51
Mean	35.74	35.57
Standard deviation	7.40	6.42
Trust		
Obtained range	16-36	20-36
Mean	31.15	32.45
Standard deviation	4.26	3.67
Love		
Obtained range	35-80	27-80
Mean	65.20	65.64
Standard deviation	9.89	9.42